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We cannot close without expressing a hope, that Mr. Wirt will still find some leisure to devote to the cause of letters and taste, amidst the multiplied and important cares, which must devolve on him in consequence of his late honourable appointment ;—that he will choose a subject more fruitful, and better adapted to his powers and his acquisitions, than the one, which has occupied him so long—and that he will support on higher ground the literary character, which, from his former productions, the voice of publick testimony has allowed him to possess.

ART. X. *C. Cornelii Taciti opera ex recensione Jo. Augusti Ernesti denuo curavit J. J. Oberlinus. Cum notis selectis.* Tom. 3. Bostoniæ ; Wells et Lilly, 1817.

AN American edition of the works of Tacitus has, we think, a particular claim to the notice and patronage of all those, who profess to be the well wishers of our rising literature. We do not say this from a belief in any imagined superiority of the ancients over the moderns in genius or taste. We are willing to admit, that Latin and Greek are not every thing, nor even the principal thing ; nay more, that there are many productions of the ancients, which are read, not for their intrinsick merit, but merely as necessary appendages to the character of a scholar. ‘Non tantam habent speciem, quantam religionem ;’ and it is of little consequence perhaps, how soon they lose even this. Nor do we place very high on the scale of mental worth those learned labourers, who have spent their lives, in settling disputed readings, or explaining doubtful passages, in a Greek or Roman classick. It is an employment, which has somewhat of the semblance of intellectual, without tasking the thoughts to that severe work of inventing and combining, which so wears upon the nerves and exhausts the spirits.

After concessions so liberal, we may surely be permitted to express the opinion, that there are many and great advantages, to be derived from the study of the classicks. It must be allowed, that even the commentators have not been without their use ; they have often thrown much light upon history, as well as upon their author ; and afforded great facilities to those, who would seek, with higher views, what is really valuable in the productions of Greece and Rome. At

that early period of life, when the languages of these nations are usually learned, their study affords a useful discipline to the mind, which could not, perhaps, at that age, be so well derived from any other source. In discovering the meaning of a passage, there is not only a vigorous exercise of the powers of invention and comprehension ; but in that grammatical analysis of each sentence, which is necessary for this purpose, a constant process of reasoning is carried on. By translation, a youth, while he acquires that copiousness of expression, so much insisted on by Quintilian, forms, at the same time, the habit of nicely discriminating the import of words, and perceiving their minutest shades of difference, and this much more from the dead, than living languages ; because their idiom and modes of combination vary more from our own. The importance of the early formation of this habit will be obvious to those, who consider, that language is not only the vehicle of our thoughts, when we impart them to others, but the very body, in which they appear to ourselves. We think in propositions, and in proportion to the propriety and definiteness of our words, will be those of our ideas. It is true, that during the period we have mentioned, many facts in geography, civil and even natural history, might be stored in the memory. But, not to mention that, especially with the children of the wealthy, there is time enough for all these ; we hold it to be a maxim, that discipline, rather than knowledge, should be the object of education. We do not consider that youth as best taught, who has read or knows the most, but him, who carries into the world an understanding, formed successfully to grapple with whatever subject may be proposed, and most able, in whatever situation he may be placed, to think and act with sagacity, with truth and effect. The languages of the classicks, once acquired, open to the maturer taste and judgment all the stores of ancient wisdom, poetry, and eloquence. Nor is it a slight knowledge of the character and manners of a people, their habits of thinking and feeling, their progress in philosophy and morals, which may be obtained from the mere vocabulary and peculiar modes of expression, prevalent among them. To be convinced of this, we have but to recollect, how many ideas in intellectual and moral science, and even more, in the relations, duties, and endearments of domestick life, are, with their appropriate terms, common among us, which cannot be expressed in the language of the Romans.

But we have said enough to intimate to our readers, which was all we intended, with what aim, and to what extent, we think these studies should be pursued. It is time that we proceed to some remarks upon the style and character of the author, before us.

The style of Tacitus we should not propose as a model for imitation ; it has something perhaps of that affectation, into which the Latin writers, after the Augustan age, generally fell. Often abrupt and involved, and sometimes so elliptical, as to be obscure, it wants that natural ease and simplicity of construction, which we admire in Cicero and Livy. Sentences perhaps are not unfrequent, in which to readers, principally conversant with the writers of the era, we have mentioned, even the grammar may seem strained. But the style of Tacitus, although it wants simplicity of structure, has all that simplicity, which depends upon the absence, of whatever is feeble, unmeaning, or unnecessary. He has, it is true, no formal figures, or studied comparisons ; for this his feelings were too rapid ; but he abounds in metaphors, the most bold and forcible. All inanimate nature beneath his touch lives and acts ; ‘terra,’ says he ‘horrida sylvis, paludibus fœda.’ He seizes from resemblance every epithet, which can increase the depth and energy of his expressions ; choosing for his purpose even more frequently analogies of effect, than of appearance ; and thus employing those, which act not only indirectly through the imagination, but immediately upon the heart. There is in his style a vigor, which depends even more upon selection, than combination ; and thus he often concentrates in a single word or phrase an import, which no translation can convey. His very ellipses, when habit has accustomed us to their use, bring upon the mind a condensation of meaning, which fills, at once, all our powers of conception.

But it is not for his style, that we principally admire this author ; his profound views of the human heart, his just development of the principles of action, his delicate touches of nature, his love of liberty and independence, and above all, the moral sensibility, which mingles, and incorporates itself with all his descriptions, are qualities, which must ever render him a favourite with the friends of philosophy and of man.

Tacitus has been truly called the philosopher of historians ; but his philosophy never arrays itself in the robe of the schools, or enters into a formal investigation of causes and

motives. It seems to show itself here and there, in the course of his facts, involuntarily, and from its own fulness, by the manner of narration, by a single word, and sometimes a general observation. Events, in his hands, have a soul, which is constantly displaying its secret workings by the attitude, into which it throws the body, by a glance of the eye, or an expression of the face, and now and then a sudden utterance of its emotions. It is not the prince, the senator, or the plebeian, that he describes ; it is always man, and the general principles of human nature ; and this in their nicer and more evanescent, as well as their boldest and most definite expressions. If we were not afraid of giving too violent a shock to classical devotees, we should say, that, in the particulars we have mentioned, Tacitus in history is not unlike Miss Edgeworth in fiction. There are indeed many circumstances, unnecessary to be pointed out, in which they differ ; but there is in both the same frequent interspersions in the narrative of short remarks, which lay open a principle of human nature, the same concise development of character by discrimination and contrast, and the nice selection of some one trait, or apparently trifling circumstance of conduct, as a key to the whole ; traits and circumstances, which, though none but a philosopher would have pointed out, find their way at once to every heart. But the historian has none of the playfulness, the humour and the mind at ease, which are seen in the novelist. He knew himself the register of facts, and facts too, in which he took the deepest interest. He records events, not as one curious in political relations, or revolutions in empires, but as marking the moral character and condition of the age ; a character and condition, which he felt were exerting a direct and powerful influence upon himself, upon those whom he loved, and with whom he lived.

The moral sensibility of Tacitus is, we think, that particular circumstance, by which he so deeply engages his reader, and is perhaps distinguished from every other writer, in the same department of literature ; and the scenes he was to describe peculiarly required this quality. His writings comprise a period, the most corrupt, within the annals of man. The reigns of the Neros and of many of their successors seemed to have brought together the opposite vices of extreme barbarism and excessive luxury ; the most ferocious cruelty and slavish submission ; voluptuousness the most effeminate, and sensuality worse than brutal. Not only all the general chari-

ties of life, but the very ties of nature were annihilated by a selfishness, the most exclusively individual. The minions of power butchered the parent, and the child hurried, to thank the emperour for his goodness. The very fountains of abomination seemed to have been broken up, and to have poured over the face of society a deluge of pollution and crimes. How important then was it for posterity, that the records of such an era should be transmitted by one, in whose personal character there should be a redeeming virtue, who would himself feel and awaken in his readers that disgust and abhorrence, which such scenes ought to excite? Such an one was Tacitus. There is in his narrative a seriousness, approaching sometimes almost to melancholy, and sometimes bursting forth in expressions of virtuous indignation. He appears always to be aware of the general complexion of the subjects, of which he is treating; and even when extraordinary instances of independence and integrity now and then present themselves, you perceive, that his mind is secretly contrasting them with those vices, with which his observation was habitually familiar. Thus in describing the pure and simple manners of the barbarous tribes of the north, you find him constantly bringing forward and dwelling upon those virtues, which were most strikingly opposed to the enormities of civilized Rome. He could not, like his cotemporary Juvenal, treat these enormities with sneering and sarcasm. To be able to laugh at vice, he thought a symptom, that one had been touched at least by its pollution; or to use his own words, and illustrate, at once, both of the remarks, we have just made; speaking of the temperance and chastity of the Germans, he says, '*Nemo enim illic ridet vitia, nec corrumpere et corrumpi sæculum vocatur.*' Therefore it is, that in reading Tacitus, our interest in events is heightened by a general sympathy with the writer, and, as in most instances, it is an excellence, when we lose the author in his story, so in this, it is no less an excellence, that we have him so frequently in our minds. It is not, that he obtrudes himself upon our notice, but that we involuntarily, though not unconsciously, see with his eyes, and feel with his feelings.

In estimating, however, the moral sentiment of this historian, we are not to judge him by the present standard, elevated and improved, as it is, by christianity. Tacitus undoubtedly felt the influence of great and prevalent errors. That war with barbarians was at all times just, and their territory and their per-

sons the lawful prey of whatever nation could seize them, it is well known, had been always the practical maxim of the Greeks, as well as the Romans. Hence we are not to be surprised, that in various passages of his work, he does not express that abhorrence of many wars, in which his countrymen were engaged, which we might otherwise have expected from him. This apology must especially be borne in mind, as we read the life of Agricola. The invasion of Britain by the Romans was as truly a violation of the rights of justice and humanity, as that of Mexico and Peru by the Spaniards ; and their leader little better in principle, than Cortes and Pizarro. Yet even here, full as was Tacitus of the glory of his father-in-law and of Rome, we have frequent indications of sensibility to the wrongs of the oppressed and plundered islanders. The well known speech of Calgacus breathes all the author's love of liberty and virtue, and exhibits the simple virtues, the generous self devotion of the Caledonians, in their last struggle for independence, in powerful contrast with the vices and ambition of their cruel and rapacious invaders.

We have mentioned what appear to us the most striking characteristic of the author before us. When compared with his great predecessour, he is no less excellent, but essentially different. Livy is only an historian, Tacitus is also a philosopher ; the former gives you images, the latter impressions. In the narration of events, Livy produces his effect by completeness and exact particularity, Tacitus by selection and condensation ; the one presents to you a panorama—you have the whole scene, with all its complicated movements and various appearances vividly before you ; the other shews you the most prominent and remarkable groups, and compensates in depth, what he wants in minuteness. Livy hurries you into the midst of the battle, and leaves you to be borne along by its tide ; Tacitus stands with you upon an eminence, where you have more tranquillity for distinct observation ; or perhaps, when the armies have retired, walks with you over the field, points out to you the spot of each most interesting particular, and shares with you those solemn and profound emotions, which you have now the composure to feel.

If the remarks we have already made are true, it is obvious that an adequate idea of whatever is most remarkable in Tacitus, cannot be obtained from translations. The language of this author is the language of poetry, the language of association and suggestion. Although in many respects universal, yet it

is much modified, if not formed, by the habits of living and thinking, in which we have grown up. There may be a coincidence in the radical ideas of corresponding terms in different tongues ; but in the innumerable trains of images and impressions, which cluster around them, which constitute their retinue of relatives and dependents, and indicate their rank and consequence, there must be the greatest variety. A word, which in one language is associated only with circumstances of dignity and interest, may have its corresponding word in another, connected with those of meanness and vulgarity.

These general remarks have a particular force, when applied to a diction, like that of Tacitus, full of metaphor and allusion. Besides, there is a life and freshness in an original, which is almost always lost in a translation. The general facts and ideas may be preserved, but deprived of all, that gave them spirit and interest. Translation seems to throw a sort of winter over the page ; there are the same trees, but they are stripped of their foliage ; the same fields, but they have lost their verdure ; the same streams, but they are frozen. Of the translations of Tacitus, the only ones, with which we are acquainted, are those of Gordon and Murphy ; and for ourselves we confess we prefer that of the former. It is very literal, and though antiquated and uncouth, often reminds us of the original. To the English reader we suppose the latter will be more acceptable. The style is easy and accommodated to our own idiom ; but it is not Tacitus. Gordon is an old coin, rough cast indeed and rusty ; but we can easily imagine it to resemble one of the emperours. Murphy is a modern imitation, polished and bright ; but might as well be called a Louis, as a Cæsar.

We owe perhaps an apology to our readers, for entering, at this time, into the particular character of a work, so long a favourite with the learned. We have been induced to do it by an earnest desire, to cooperate with the liberal efforts of the publishers of the present edition, to encourage among us a taste for the best Latin classicks. In adding the works of Tacitus to those of Cicero, they have greatly increased the obligation, which the friends of American literature already owed them. The editions of the historian of the Cæsars, most common in our libraries and book stores, are the Edinburgh, and that of Oberlin ; neither of them well suited to the character of our scholars. The former, entirely without notes, does not afford those facilities, which are almost necessary, for understand-

ing the author ; while the latter is greatly enlarged in size, and consequently in expense, by a multiplicity of notes, the principal object of which is, to settle by argument and authorities the true reading of the text.

In the present edition, which is a republication of Oberlin's text, the editor has, very judiciously we think, omitted most of the critical notes, while he retains those, which are explanatory, adding many others of the same character, principally from Brotier. He has also inserted from Brotier the pedigree of the Cæsars, with short biographical notes to each name ; containing in the whole nearly fifty pages, together with a very copious historical index. He has omitted the index latinitatis ; because, we presume, it was thought to be rendered unnecessary by the explanations in the notes. We are thus furnished with an edition of Tacitus, which, while it offers to the student all the helps, he can desire, is without any of the voluminous appendages of, to us at least, unnecessary learning ; and promises, so far as we can judge, to be more useful, than any with which we are at present acquainted. We repeat, that we think the publick already much indebted to the talents, classical learning and taste of the editor of this work ; and we earnestly hope, the publishers will find in a liberal patronage sufficient inducement to add, in due time, to those of Cicero and Tacitus, editions of Quintilian and Livy, and if possible all the best Latin classicks, which will, beside their intrinsick merit, have, to every American, the strong recommendation, that they are our own.

ART. XI. *History of the United States, from their first settlement as English Colonies, in 1607, to the year 1808, or the thirty third of their sovereignty and independence. By David Ramsay, M. D. Continued to the Treaty of Ghent, by S. S. Smith, D. D. and LL. D. and other literary gentlemen. 3 vols. 8vo. Philadelphia, M. Carey, 1816.*

ANY historical work, from the pen of Dr. Ramsay, has a high claim to respect. His character, as an historian, is too well established, either to need proof, or to require comment. Whoever had read his History of the American Revolution, or his History of South Carolina, could not fail to take up the volumes before us with more than ordinary